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OO RUEHDBU
DE RUEHEK #0528/01 1281218
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081218Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9518
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2138
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0227
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0239
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0718
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0527
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0234
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0395
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC 0567
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0588
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2537
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1918
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000528

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (GEHRENBECK)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [CASC](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PEDESTRIAN DEATH FOCUSES ATTENTION ON U.S.
AIR BASE

BISHKEK 00000528 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Late on May 7, a Kyrgyz pedestrian was struck and killed by a Kyrgyz automobile in a hit-and-run accident near Manas airport. A car carrying an Amcit contractor at the U.S. air base was also damaged apparently when the pedestrian's body hit the vehicle after being struck by the Kyrgyz vehicle. According to the Amcit and his Kyrgyz wife (the driver), the Amcit stopped to render CPR while the Kyrgyz vehicle, as well as another Kyrgyz vehicle traveling in convoy, sped off. The Amcit and his wife are being questioned by Ministry of Interior (MVD) officials in the presence of Embassy and base personnel. Initial media accounts blamed a U.S. military serviceman for the death. The Prosecutor General opened a criminal investigation into the incident, but assured the Ambassador that he would prevent any political overtones from developing from the case. MVD officials may be attempting to steer the investigation to focus only on the Amcit vehicle, and find the driver guilty of manslaughter. Later Kyrgyz media accounts placed the Amcit's Kyrgyz wife behind the wheel, but not before Russian media began reporting the initial, incorrect version of the incident, claiming a U.S. serviceman had run over and killed a Kyrgyz citizen. End summary.

Facts of the Matter

¶2. (SBU) At approximately 23:40 on May 7, a Kyrgyz pedestrian (identified in the media as Zarylbek Askarbekov) was struck and killed on the main road leading from Manas airport to Bishkek. According to available information,

Jason Friend (Amcit: please protect), his U.S. legal resident wife Olga Kolko, their child and her mother were traveling towards Bishkek when Askarbekov's body struck their vehicle after Askarbekov was hit by one of two other passing vehicles. Kolko, who was driving, stopped and her husband attempted CPR on Askarbekov for about eight minutes. (Note: Friend is a civilian contractor employed at the U.S. Manas air base. End note.) After onlookers arrived, they accused Friend of killing the Kyrgyz, and Friend and his family left the scene and traveled to Bishkek.

¶3. (SBU) Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI) personnel contacted the Manas Village Ministry of Interior (MVD) Chief Telek about the incident. Subsequently, Friend and Kolko reported to a Bishkek clinic for a blood alcohol test, which they both passed. Later, Friend and Kolko traveled to the Manas MVD office for questioning in the presence of an Embassy ARSO, FSN and OSI representative.

Kyrgyz Authorities Act

¶4. (C) According to feedback from the U.S. observers, the preliminary investigation validated Friend's account of the incident. However, upon briefing more senior personnel, the MVD's Telek reported that the investigation had been halted and that the Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's office wanted to file a formal criminal investigation. (Note: The Prosecutor General later told the Ambassador this investigation is not directed at any specific individual. End note.) By this point, neither Friend nor Kolko had made an official statement. Kyrgyz Lt Col Moldaliev, who was chief investigator of the Hatfield shooting, has been assigned to lead this case. The vehicle driven by Kolko (which actually

BISHKEK 00000528 002.2 OF 003

is registered to another individual) has been seized as evidence. The investigation was transferred from Manas village to regional Sokuluk district authorities. MVD officials are now questioning Friend and Kolko in separate rooms. An Embassy employee overheard two senior MVD officials state that they wanted the investigation to focus on just one vehicle being involved in the accident, and that the autopsy report and police investigation report should both conclude that the victim was struck by only one car) that driven by Kolko.

Embassy/Base Response

¶5. (C) After an initial telephone conversation, the Ambassador met Prosecutor General Elmurza Satybaldiev to discuss the case. Satybaldiev noted the Ambassador's concern that media accounts and leaks had developed a political overtone. He promised to prevent any political overtones, and repeated that a criminal investigation is being launched into the accident, and not against Friend. Satybaldiev noted that Friend was a passenger and "there is no law against this in Kyrgyzstan." However, he said Friend would be questioned, and wondered why Kolko, and not Friend, was behind the wheel.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador also contacted Foreign Minister Karabayev, National Security Council Secretary Mamytov and Presidential Chief of Staff Sadyrkulov to discuss the incident. Karabayev complained that "he was upset with yet another base incident taking place," and Mamytov urged the base to cooperate fully with the investigation. All the comments revealed a rapid rush to judgment ascribing guilt to the U.S. party. Karabayev and Mamytov also questioned the relationship between Friend and Kolko. Minister of Interior Nogoibayev has been unavailable. Earlier in the day, the MFA advised the Embassy to prepare a press statement. Embassy has provided input into guidance base public affairs personnel have drafted. (Current draft will be e-mailed to PPD.)

Press Begin Reporting

17. (U) Initial press accounts reported that "an American military serviceman" killed a Kyrgyz citizen. Media reports identified the pedestrian as 50 year-old Zarylbek Askarbekov, who worked as a driver at Manas airport. Relatives reportedly took Askarbaekov's body home before investigators arrived on the scene.

18. (U) Subsequent Kyrgyz media accounts clarified that the American was not behind the wheel, and identified his wife (Kolko) as the driver. Sokuluk police station official Mirlan Termechikov informed the media that Friend was cooperating with the investigation. Russian media has picked up the story, reporting the initial incorrect version that a U.S. serviceman had killed a Kyrgyz citizen.

19. (U) Embassy has fielded numerous calls, including from representatives of AP and Reuters. Inquiries have been forwarded to the base public affairs office.

Comment

10. (C) Initial media accounts of the incident immediately

BISHKEK 00000528 003.2 OF 003

blaming U.S. military forces for the death of a Kyrgyz citizen make it painfully clear what a fragile political environment the base operates in, and how quickly any incident, however tenuously connected to the base, can be twisted out of all proportion. While the facts may become apparent as the investigation continues, and some subsequent press reporting has been more accurate than the initial accounts, indications that the Kyrgyz police may manufacture a case against the U.S. contractor's wife are alarming. Embassy will continue to work with the base and Kyrgyz officials to press for a fair investigation and factual reporting. Wednesday is a local holiday commemorating the end of World War II. Embassy will continue to monitor coverage and developments.

YOVANOVITCH